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**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD  
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

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Landmark/District:	<b>Sixteenth Street Historic District/ Christian Science Monitor Building</b>	(x) Agenda
Address:	<b>900 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW</b>	( ) Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>October 25, 2012</b>	(x) Demolition
H.P.A. Number:	<b>12-035</b>	(x) New Construction
Date Received:	<b>10/3/2012</b>	( ) Subdivision
Staff Reviewers:	<b>David Maloney, Steve Callcott</b>	(x) Conceptual Design

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The Third Church of Christ, Scientist (Third Church) and ICG 16<sup>th</sup> Street Associates LLC (ICG) return to the Board for review of the design concept for a new structure to replace the existing Third Church and Christian Science Monitor Building. These buildings are listed together as a historic landmark in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites, and the property lies within the Sixteenth Street Historic District, although the buildings are considered non-contributing to the district.

In May 2009, the Mayor's Agent approved the demolition of the Third Church building on the basis of economic hardship. That decision authorizes demolition of the church once a permit is issued to construct a new church on the site.

In May 2012, the Board reviewed a previous version of the development concept proposal and recommended that it be revised to conform more closely to the prevailing heights and urban design character of the Sixteenth Street Historic District.

### **Revisions to the Proposed Development Concept**

The applicant's revised development concept is illustrated in the concept design submission dated October 25, 2012. It is for an eight-story office building incorporating a new house of worship for Third Church, ground level retail space, underground parking and a rooftop event space with outdoor terrace.

The most significant revision from the previous development concept is that one office floor has been removed from the building design, thus lowering the overall building height and reducing the visual impact of the building penthouse.

The proposed building façades have also been refined to increase the proportion of stone relative to glass. The glassy corners are retained from the earlier concept, but in the main body of the building, an intermediate limestone mullion has been added at each office window bay to give the building a distinctly more solid appearance and a more vertical expression. At the top of the building, a canopy has been added at the roof terrace in the form of a long porch supported by a line of simple square piers.

The church component of the project is similar to that shown before, with the addition of a slight projection of the folded glass façade a few feet beyond the building line.

## Evaluation

Each of the major revisions in the present scheme represents a significant improvement to the concept design, so that the cumulative result is a proposal appropriately scaled to the historic district and far more compatible with the historic character of lower 16<sup>th</sup> Street.



EYE STREET ELEVATION



16<sup>TH</sup> STREET ELEVATION

The beneficial effect of the height reduction is immediately apparent in the building elevations. The building now appears to be in scale with its adjacent neighbors. As before, the main cornice height remains a few feet above the 90-foot line established by the zoning along the street, but a lower visual datum is established by the dropped corners. This line is further reinforced by a newly introduced setback above the seventh floor where it is most critical—at the recessed office façade behind the glassy church front. This allows the building to meet its neighbor to the north with a slightly lower façade, and allows the double-height modular pattern of the façade to step down in scale where it forms a backdrop to the church. The total effect, as can be seen in the rendered View 12, is of a coherent and balanced full-block composition with the church nestled comfortably in the center.



VIEW 12

Because the building still rises 3.7 feet above the 90-foot cornice height (as before), zoning relief is required. With the elimination of the office floor, however, the overall building height to the top of the penthouse is now 112 feet, roughly in line with the present matter-of-right maximum (108.5 feet) and lower than the total height of its immediate historic neighbor across the street, the International Laborer's Union Building built in 1959 (see Eye Street Elevation). A further benefit of the lowered penthouse is that the tower of the ULICO building to the west is now more fully revealed, and appears to be a natural part of a thoughtful urban design composition (see again View 12). As with the existing church complex, the tower acts as a "borrowed" visual element providing a vertical accent to a mostly horizontal ensemble of buildings.

The effect of coherent urban design is further reinforced by the changes to the building facades. As before, the facades are primarily limestone, but now with the introduction of a white marble base and trim around the upper floor windows. These materials relate the building to both its immediate neighbors and the predominant materials of monumental Washington. The increased proportion of stone and enhanced verticality impart a dignity and elegance that befits the historic context, and parenthetically reinforce the harmonious relationship with the tower beyond.

The rooftop porch is another element that both terminates the building with an attractive skyline and relates it to the historic context. The porch largely disguises the building mass behind it, effectively lowering the visual height of the building. It also suggests a graceful amenity on the rooftop and forms a gentle echo of top floor at the AFL-CIO building diagonally opposite. This kind of thoughtful urbanism is an essential quality of lower 16<sup>th</sup> Street.



AFL-CIO



With these adjustments in height and façade design, the church façade also seems more in scale and a more convincing sculptural gem amid its masonry neighbors. The slight outward bow of the façade also helps to give it added presence and architectural interest consistent with the importance of the street.



And again, as a larger composition, the glass elements of the church, corner glass bay on the office building, and glassy tower behind combine to create the effect of coordinated verticality stretching toward the sky.

### **Suggestions for Further Design Development**

The staff recommends that the applicant consult further with the staff on one particular item of refinement as the building proceeds to design development. This relates to the way in which the rooftop porch returns on the north and south sides of the main building block. On the south side, the upper corner of the main block is very cleanly resolved with a balanced composition of simple geometric elements, beautifully capped by a glimpse of the porch soffit. On the north side of the block, however, the similar condition is not as well resolved, even though the same basic solution is possible at both corners. On the north end, the addition of a one-bay return of the eighth floor façade and the terrace level recess behind the columns would result in a better



SOUTH



NORTH

architectural resolution more consistent with the classical symmetry and repose of the building composition. It would also eliminate the view of the upper roof peeking over the porch. As drawings of the façade details for the office building and church are submitted for review, the staff would benefit from the advice and assistance of an architect from the Board. Otherwise, the design appears sufficiently resolved for delegation of final review to the staff

### **Demolition of the Christian Science Monitor Building**

This development concept is of course predicated on the demolition of the Christian Science Monitor Building, the companion structure to the Third Church. With the demolition of the church already approved on the basis of economic hardship, the integrity of the Monitor Building will require reevaluation.

The two buildings were designated as a single historic landmark in specific recognition of their unity as an architectural composition, with the Monitor Building serving as a relatively neutral backdrop or foil to the more sculptural church. Indeed, the buildings are structurally unified by means of a common underground parking garage that is continuous underneath the plaza. The architectural concept and ensemble would be destroyed by the demolition of the church. Once this occurs, the integrity of the historic landmark will no longer remain and the Monitor Building will lack sufficient integrity on its own to represent the qualities that made the complex worthy of designation.

### **Recommendations**

*The staff recommends that the Board find the following:*

- *the revised concept is compatible with the character of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Historic District;*
- *final review is delegated to the staff, with Board assistance as needed; and*
- *with demolition of the church, the Monitor Building will no longer retain integrity as a historic landmark, and its demolition would be consistent with the purposes of the preservation law.*